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Politics

The Heritage Model

Besides finding a Democratic national chairman with the organizational skills of Republican chairman Bill Brock, besides raising lots of money and training new candidates at the grassroots level, and besides thinking about a new agenda, the liberal movement in America needs its own counterpart to the conservative Heritage Foundation—a fast-moving, well-financed, highly visible research and propaganda organization capable of analyzing issues from a liberal perspective and getting its product quickly into the hands of members of Congress and the press. The liberal establishment has its think tanks, notably the Brookings Institution and the Carnegie Endowment, which traditionally provide refuge for people who have been or aspire to be top Cabinet and subcabinet officers in Democratic administrations. The Republican establishment has the American Enterprise Institute, Stanford's Hoover Institution, and Georgetown's Center for Strategic and International Studies. Such organizations can be depended upon to produce, besides high officials, high policy—lengthy, learned, and often definitive studies on large public policy issues.

But nobody else is quite like the Heritage Foundation—organizationally, functionally, or ideologically. Instead of serving up grand concepts for the executive branch and academia, Heritage has concentrated on short (5,000 to 10,000 word) issue analyses primarily for legislators and their assistants. The subject matter and implicit conclusions of Heritage Issue Bulletins (studies of specific legislation) and Backgrounders (broader issues studies) have a distinct right-wing tilt. Heritage is against the windfall profits tax, fair housing amendments, and hospital cost containment; for higher defense spending, a constitutional amendment on abortion, and energy deregulation. But the research is solid and detailed, the arguments are clear, and the impact on congressional debate and press commentary is impressive. There are a number of liberal organizations that publish newsletters on specific issues—arms control, domestic surveillance, civil rights, and labor—but none cover the entire spectrum of public policy, as Heritage does, and consistently turn out dependable research. Liberals probably didn't need a Heritage Foundation when the Democrats controlled the fact-marching machinery of both houses of Congress and the executive. But they do now.

Instead of being staffed with graybeards who address each other as Mr. Secretary, Heritage has 20 or so professionals, all under 40. Most are recent or soon-to-be PhDs earning between \$15,000 and \$25,000 a year who look forward to advancing to congressional staff jobs rather than walnut-lined slots in the upper bureaucracy. With so many liberals forced out of Senate and administration jobs in the November landslide, it ought to be easy to find comparable or superior brainpower to populate a liberal Heritage. The problem may be in finding people as energetic.

Heritage is also ideologically distinct from the establishment think tanks of the right and left. It is a committed rightist organization, although the Reagan victory, the rightward drift of American public opinion, and the rise of farther-out organizations make it seem far less incendiary and extremist than it might have looked five or even three years ago. One official of a major traditional think tank says that "anything to the right of the Heritage is the fringe." But Heritage's own administrators regard it as "mainstream conservative," representing all the principal strains of US conservatism—the traditional right (William F. Buckley's variety, and also John Ashbrook's and Phil Crane's), economic libertarians (Milton Friedman's kind), the anti-communist and hardline pro-defense right (Ronald Reagan's traditional base), the new right (Phyllis Schlafly, Jerry Falwell, Richard Viguerie and company), and, increasingly, neoconservatives (Irving Kristol's crowd, Pat Moynihan's, and Midge Decter's). Presumably it would be difficult to form a similar alliance of disparate liberal interest groups, since cohesion among them does not exist. But all strains of liberalism wouldn't have to be represented in a liberal Heritage. For one thing, the left-liberal or radical strain already has its own think tank, the Institute for Policy Studies. What's needed is a research factory for Kennedy-Mondale-Jackson-McGovern moderate liberals, where they can fight for consensus and produce critiques of what the conservatives are doing in Congress, within the administration, and at the Heritage Foundation.

Such an enterprise requires an entrepreneur such as Heritage has in Edward J. Feulner Jr., a 39-year-old former Chicagoan who became a conservative in college reading Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*, Buckley's *God and Man at Yale*, and Barry Goldwater's *Conscience of a Conservative*. Feulner went on to do graduate work at the London School of Economics and came to Washington as a congressional aide. He served briefly as personal assistant to Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, then returned to the Hill, first as an aide to Representative Phil Crane, then as director of the Republican Study Committee, a consortium of right-